

# DAYAH, THE TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION SYSTEM OF ACEH 1900-2000

Stephen Roche

Theology and Philosophy, Trinity College, Dublin, Irelandia  
roches5@tcd.ie

## *Abstract*

*This article is an extract from my dissertation which offers a historiography of the Dayah, Aceh's traditional institution of Islamic education and picks up at the point of Aceh's history where its Dutch colonial experience began. The section presented here details some of the theological, philosophical and political factors that contributed to the development of the regions current variety of educational institutions. However, despite the effects of such historical and ongoing developments, that continue to inform the theological understanding and social concerns of Aceh's ulama, the Dayah still manages to represent a distinct Muslim identity that express the richest cultural heritages of the region within an orthodox religious framework. Therefore, the Dayah of Aceh continues the traditional Islamic educational experience for the Muslims of the region despite the historical and ongoing influence of cultural, political and social developments.*

**Keywords:** *dayah (Aceh's Islamic traditional institution of education), Dutch, 'ulama, Aceh, conflict*

## *Abstrak*

*Artikel ini merupakan bagian dari penelitian disertasi yang menjelaskan historiografi Dayah, salah satu lembaga pendidikan tradisional di Aceh. Kajian ini akan lebih memberikan fokus pada sejarah Aceh pada permulaan periode Belanda. Studi ini akan memaparkan faktor-faktor teologis, filosofis, dan politik yang memberikan kontribusi terhadap perkembangan berbagai lembaga pendidikan. Namun demikian, kendati sudah terjadi perubahan dalam lintasan sejarah dan perkembangan, dayah masih menjadi satu institusi yang memperlihatkan identitas Muslim yang sangat kaya dengan warisan dari aspek pendidikan ortodoks. Karena itu, dayah di Aceh masih melanjutkan keberlangsungan pendidikan tradisional Islam bagi ummat Islam walaupun telah terjadi perubahan dan pengaruh dari perkembangan kebudayaan, politik, dan budaya.*

**Kata Kunci:** *dayah, Belanda, 'ulama, Aceh, konflik*

## **Aceh's Colonial Experience**

As Professor Hans Bakker points out, although the Aceh war was a 'little war' it lasted for forty years (1873-1913), where the total number of KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*) or The Royal Netherlands East Indies Army forces in Aceh numbered between 6'000 to 8,000 men at any one time, of which approximately 7,700 soldiers and officers died from either battle or disease and at least 9,000 more were wounded. Furthermore, the Professor estimates that 'tens of thousands of

Acehnese guerrilla fighters, at least 30,000 and very likely as many as 100,000, died in battle or as a result of diseases like cholera and malaria' (Bakker, 1993: 62). Indeed, Bakker asserts that this war was fought entirely for Dutch colonial aims that were, in turn, inspired by worldwide European colonial expansion during the nineteenth century and carried out without understanding anything about Aceh, its people or its culture. Thus, since the Dutch were unaware of Acehnese social structures or religious commitment, the KNIL's lack of understanding ensured that the conflict dragged on for as long as it did largely because they did not understand who they were fighting.

Indeed, as Bakker (1993: 62) observes, 'the men who...opposed the Dutch were united by their Islamic faith and learning.' Thus, in an attempt to develop an effective management policy for Aceh, the Dutch turned to Holland's leading Islamic scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), who had studied theology and Semitic letters at Leiden University before, eventually, lecturing there on Arabic. Yet, it is widely claimed that Hurgronje had visited Mecca in 1885 disguised as a Muslim in order to make contact with Indonesian and Acehnese *hajis* before going on to advise the Dutch East India trading company on oriental languages and Islamic law. Hence, in 1893 the Dutch scholar advised the colonial government on how best to administer the recently acquired sultanate of Aceh and in 1898 the Dutch lecturer was given the title of Adviser for Native and Arab Affairs.

Thus, declaring himself to be Muslim, Hurgronje stayed in Aceh for several years to study the local people and culture in order to devise the most efficient way for the Dutch to subjugate and exploit the local population. Where, the Dutchman's subsequent recommendations included a ruthless plan to destroy Islamic resistance by crushing the *ulama* and removing their public support by placing power in the hands of Aceh's *uleebelang* (elites) instead. Therefore, the colonial government cultivated local *uleebelang* by centralising economic activity and political power in order to counterbalance the influence of the religious scholars. Indeed, Hurgronjes policy eventually succeeded as Islamic control began to weaken in the face of economic expansion in Aceh.

Yet, while one of Hurgronje's reports states that before 'the coming of the Dutch to Aceh there were numerous schools throughout the country' (Hadi, 1992: 86). the KNIL forces implementation of the Dutch scholars colonial policy caused enormous damage to the regions traditional education system, as the ongoing conflict destroyed most of the *dayahs* that were either 'closed down or... burned to the ground' (Amiruddin, 1994: 19). Furthermore, extensive libraries were destroyed, while other texts hidden in the jungle for safe keeping were ruined or discovered and taken by the Dutch. Indeed, since the activities of the KNIL and the implementation of Hurgronjes policy denied many Achenese youths the opportunity to acquire an education, the *ulama* realised that the next generation would be illiterate if they did not rebuild their school system and return to teaching.

However, while many *ulama* continued their resistance, after a number of leading *ulama* were killed in 1910-12 and 'on more than one occasion the students from these schools threw themselves, practically unarmed, upon the bayonets of the Dutch troops' (Hadi, 1992: 86) it appears that organised guerrilla resistance more or less ceased. Hence, 'the Achenese abandoned the policy of open confrontation with the Dutch, and several *ulama* returned to their villages' (Amiruddin, 1994: 19) in order to establish new *dayah* or to re-open older ones. Therefore, the Islamic education system of Aceh, which had organically developed, uninterrupted for over six centuries, while also drawing upon the theology of a religious tradition established in the seventh century CE, experienced its first recorded period of interrupted transmission.

Yet, as Anthony Reid, points out, 'in Dutch eyes the traditional kuranic (sic) education the *ulama* had provided taught Acehnese youths nothing but hatred and scorn for the *kafir*' (1979: 21). Indeed, the ongoing occurrence of suicidal attacks on Europeans or 'Aceh murders' continued until

the Dutch left in 1942, where 'the attacker would put his affairs in order in preparation for a hero's death, go to a town...to find Dutchmen, and suddenly spring upon one with his *rencong* (dagger) or *klewang* (long knife)' (Reid, 1979: 11). However, the Dutch colonial administration continuously dismissed these attacks as the manifestation of a psychological disorder peculiar to the region, rather than publicly acknowledge them as suicidal attacks against the representatives of colonial occupation.

Hence, the Dutch administration set out to establish a competing 'government system of schools, less out of idealism or a desire for educated officials than as an integral part of the strategy of pacification' (Reid, 1979:21). Thus, a foreign system of educational institutions was established, known as 'Dutch-native schools (H.I.S.), of which there were by 1938 eight in Aceh with about 1,500 pupils' (Reid, 1979: 21). However, initially these schools were exclusively for the children of local elites, as the future native representatives of Dutch colonial policy, whose secular education included the language, culture and bureaucratic practices necessary for the administration of the region on behalf of the ruling power. While, for the children of the ordinary Acehnese a basic three-year *volkschools* (village school) system was initiated in 1907, developed to teach reading and writing in Romanized Malay, where, by 1935, 'there were over 33,000 children attending *volkschools* in Aceh' (Reid, 1979: 22).

However, Amiruddin (1994: 19) points to 'the fact that, in 1930 ninety three percent of the... Indonesian people were illiterate' to support his argument that the Dutch were unwilling or unable to provide a basic education for the local Acehnese. Where, as Amiruddin observes, the colonial administration, 'who occupied most of the urban area of Aceh...wanted to train the Acheneese to be loyal to the Dutch'(Amiruddin, 1994: 21) rather than educate them. Yet, R. Murray Thomas points out that, the 'Netherlands Indies colonial government not only sponsored schools but also encouraged private European groups, such as Christian religious orders, to do likewise' (Thomas, 1988: 899). Hence, the *ulama* remained committed to saving their students from the influence of the *kafir* faith by building their own schools and subsequently issued a *fatwa* that attendance of the Dutch school system, which the Acehnese referred to as *sikula kaphe* (infidel school), was *haram* (forbidden). However, the colonial administration's education policies attempted to exert control of the *dayah's* curriculum by forbidding subjects that related to politics and controlling information on the activities of Muslims in the wider Islamic world. Furthermore, the Dutch prevented the Muslim youth from going to high school or obtaining a further education, instead they only allowed the children of the *uleebalang* to continue their studies as it was thought that students who studied with the *ulama* would not be loyal to them so the Dutch 'preferred to leave them ignorant'(Amiruddin, 1994: 19).

Thus, new systems of colonial bureaucratic structures and institutions were imposed on the population of Aceh, where a secular or Christian education system that taught foreign languages, foreign literatures and foreign concepts, was established. Indeed, the most important change was arguably the introduction of a European, secular or Christian elementary and post elementary school system which set out to produce compliance amongst the Acehnese. Where, the traditional Muslim educators and their students were confronted by a foreign education system that either ignored religion altogether or taught another one, while also introducing an entirely new foreign curriculum with new school structures and different teaching methods.

## Secular and Islamic Education

Thus, the colonial education system introduced a new disciplined; enrolment, promotion, and graduation process which included registration requirements, formal examinations, a grading system, class schedules as well as a fixed number of years for the student's elementary and secondary education. Furthermore, the formal methods of instruction favoured by the teachers of the western system were considered impersonal and utilitarian when compared to the informal and intensely personal process favoured by the *ulama* of the traditional *dayah* schools.

Indeed, the foreign education system served to exclude those members of Acehese society that the colonial administration deemed less compliant, instead favouring the families of elites. However, the rapid growth of the colonial systems secular and Christian schools forced some *ulama* to modernise the curriculum of their own educational institutions in order to keep them relevant. Hence, some *ulama*, who embraced the modernisation of knowledge, attempted to face the challenge of the foreign education system by establishing Western-style schools, different from those of the colonial administrations system, by maintaining an Islamic approach to the curriculum as well as a maintaining their particular religious perspective of the disciplines and administration of the institution.

Yet, as Professor R. Murray Thomas argues 'the main goal of European schools at the primary and general secondary levels was to produce well-informed people' (Thomas, 1988: 900). Hence, the secular education system, especially when combined with specific vocational training, really only sets out to produce efficient workers. Furthermore, while the educators of such schools certainly hoped that their students would become good Christians; the amount of time spent on religious education was comparatively short. Indeed, as Thomas (1998: 900) points out, 'the source of truth for most of the curriculum topics in European schools was not the revealed word of God,' rather, such truth was based on the contents of textbooks which detailed accounts of scholarly conclusions and theories, largely derived from knowledge based on the methodology of European post-enlightenment informed historiography, philosophical determination of natural phenomena and scientific experimentation.

However, while the distinct educational experience provided by the Islamic system of learning taught students in a unique manner, it was the epistemology of Islamic education that contributed to its greatest achievements. Yet, as Professor Mark Halstead (2004: 524) argues, while Islamic philosophical thought recognises that 'knowledge may be derived either from divine revelation or from the activity of the human intellect,' this does not mean that it can be 'divided into two classes, one religious and the other secular (Halstead, 2004: 524).' Rather, that all knowledge is theologically significant because it should ultimately provide the necessary information to make people more aware of their religious commitments and to define their relationship with God. Furthermore, that 'revealed knowledge' provides the basis of all knowledge as long as the acquisition of such knowledge conforms to the divine laws contained in the *Qur'an*. Therefore, Islamic theological epistemology must be the basis of all education that aspires to educate Muslims, holding together the systems curriculum in an integrated whole, as all knowledge requires the guiding spirit of religion to remain consistent with orthodox Islamic religious values.

Indeed, Professor Halstead goes on to claim that within this Islamic epistemological framework knowledge for its own sake has no real value as its ideal purpose is to produce Muslims and, by extension, *umma* (Muslim communities) who know the truth of God's divine law. Hence, education and the pursuit of knowledge should serve to stimulate the moral awareness and spiritual consciousness of the student by establishing *iman* or 'faith', encouraging *amal salih* or 'virtuous

action' and providing *yaqin* or 'certainty' of religious orthodoxy, all of which are continuously emphasized in the *Qur'an* (e.g. Q 103:3 and 15:99). Thus, the aim of a classical Islamic education is to provide the necessary knowledge to establish the boundaries within which Muslims can engage with the world, confident in the certainty of God's grand design.

However, Halstead acknowledges that, from a western, post-enlightenment, liberal perspective the theologically informed, epistemological principles of an Islamic education, as outlined here, present a number of difficulties. Where, the definition of knowledge as the acquisition of absolute certainty is problematic, especially since this certainty is based on religious beliefs which ultimately 'excludes the possibility of subjecting such beliefs to any critical investigation' (Halstead, 2004: 526) that might impact upon their certainty. Indeed, the categorization of revealed knowledge as immutable, despite reasonable challenges to its reliability, raises additional problems. Yet, the professor's final analysis that as a result of this Islamic theological concept of knowledge certain intellectual skills are discouraged within Islamic education such as; 'questioning, verifying, criticizing, evaluating and making judgements' which as he says are ignored 'in favour of the uncritical acceptance of authority', must be considered highly subjective. Yet, this assertion is used, in turn to support Halstead's further claim, made from a professed 'liberal perspective,' that the Islamic education system is therefore 'open to accusations of indoctrination' by denying students 'independence and control over their own lives'(Halstead, 2004: 526).

Whereupon, Professor Halstead concludes his analysis of the Islamic concept of knowledge, with reference to the vast difference that exists between Islamic thought and western liberal conceptions, as 'ultimately unbridgeable' before finally appealing to the contemporary Muslim philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, for the quote, 'there exist such profound and absolute differences between Islam and western culture that they cannot be reconciled' (Halstead, 2004: 526).

However, without the benefit of a 'western liberal perspective' the philosophers and educators of the classical Islamic world had to consider the concept of knowledge within the limitations of their own epistemology. Indeed, Professor Franz Rosenthal appears to recognise this when he defines the Islamic concept of knowledge, in its *Qur'anic* religious definition of *ilm* as the premise of religious existence that serves to define the religious duties of the Muslim from the perspective of the specific 'knowledge of Islamic religious doctrines and obligations' (Rosenthal 1975: 5) which in turn should be considered as 'one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion' (Rosenthal 2007: 2). Therefore, for the religious scholars of the classical Islamic world, education in a secular system would not necessarily provide real knowledge since only an Islamic education could fulfil the religious obligations incumbent upon Muslims to acquire '*ilm*.'

## Islamic Modernisation

Hence, a new generation of youths, educated in the innovative European styled institutions, methods and curriculum, became a feature of the dominant section of Acehnese society during the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet, these young well educated Acehnese did not unconditionally accept Dutch rule. Rather, they accepted new forms of organization and awareness which inspired them to 'measure Aceh's dignity in terms not of desperate Muslim defiance to the conqueror but of catching up with the new forces transforming both the Islamic and Indonesian worlds' (Reid, 1979: 11). Thus, the members of a new generation of Dutch-educated *uleebalang* began to push for social and economic reforms without overtly appealing to traditional Acehnese or orthodox religious legitimacy. Indeed, as Professor Edward Aspinall claims, 'the Islamic organisations which began

to bind Muslims together in other parts of the Dutch East Indies during the first decades of the twentieth century had difficulties striking deep roots in Aceh' (Aspinall, 2007: 248). Furthermore, the modernist ideas, of the Islamic reform movements, 'then emanating from the Middle East, did not gain much support in Aceh, where it was seen as a vehicle for...*uleebalang* interests' (Aspinall, 2007: 248).

However, since the *uleebalang* were the basis of Dutch influence in Aceh and in light of the colonial regime's growing need for native administrators, state funded programmes of general education expanded in the growing urban areas, while the *ulama* attempted to re establish or maintain *dayahs* beyond the reach of Dutch control. Yet, while the amount of *dayahs* that were rebuilt might have approached pre-war numbers, Hasbi Amiruddin claims that they lacked the same quality, due to the loss of both *ulama* and their students, during the war with the Dutch, as well as the lack of available funds and the tragic loss of traditional teaching materials. Furthermore, as Amiruddin points out, the *dayahs* activities were carefully monitored by the Dutch, who attempted to control the curriculum. Indeed, he further claims that the European colonialists captured and imprisoned or exiled many *ulama*, some of whom travelled to Mecca and Cairo, but maintained their links with the *ulama* in Aceh, inspiring them with the ideas they were exposed to, especially those 'they learned from the political situation in the middle east' (Amiruddin, 1994: 20).

Hence, the neo orthodox, post European enlightenment, Islamic reformism that emerged from the doctrinal teachings of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and the writings of Rashid Rida (1865-1935) both of whom considered themselves disciples of the Islamic Salafiyya tradition, first established by the *al-salaf al-salih* (pious forefathers) of the Islamic Faith, exerted some degree of influence on the *ulama* of Aceh. Where, Abduh, a Muslim theologian and founder of the Egyptian modernist school, used his position as grand Mufti of Egypt (1899-1905) and journalist, to both define and shape public opinion toward the ultimate goal of liberation for all Muslims, which he claimed would herald a renaissance of Islam within its own orthodox framework. While, Rida, whose journal *al-manar*, focused on Islamic reform and advocated political plans for Pan-Arabism, managed to rub shoulders with most of the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Ibn Saud and the Sharif of Mecca, where, despite being a *naqshbandi murid* in his youth, Rida was increasingly critical of ideas and practices which appeared to him as false and harmful Sufism. Indeed, as a publisher, Rida, who had endorsed the Wahhabi movement by describing them as the defenders of true Islam, enjoyed extraordinary influence in many parts of the Islamic world as the spokesman of the Salafiyya.

Indeed, one of the central features of the Salafi movement, as well as the many reform movements that it inspired, was the recognition that, in terms of scientific and technological development, the Muslim world had fallen behind Europe despite Islam being the source of revealed knowledge. Hence, while Islamic orthodoxy, as defined and practiced by the prophet Muhammad along with *al-salaf al-salih* (pious followers), could not be the source of error, it was, therefore, the subsequent acceptance of Islamic doctrine derived from dubious sources and the incorporation of unorthodox cultural traditions that had led Muslims astray. Thus, the Wahhabi inspired Salafi movement set out to reform Islam by purifying the religion of any beliefs and practices without valid orthodox justification. Furthermore, these modernist reformers of religious practice also identified the traditional structures of Islamic society, the Muslim education and legal systems, as sources of the *umma's* cultural and religious stagnation.

Hence, the idea that the reform of Islam was necessary to ensure the survival of the Muslim community in the modern world became a part of the intellectual discourse of the *ulama* in Aceh,

as they were faced with either the reconstruction of their religious tradition or the development of a modern one, under Dutch colonial occupation. Yet, while most *ulama* recognised that it was necessary for the Acehnese to continue their struggle against the modern political and economic agencies of the colonial power by maintaining their traditional Islamic identity, there were many *ulama* who sought to reform orthodox Islamic identity in order to gain control of the political and economic institutions of the modern nation state. Thus, on one hand many of the Acehnese *ulama* reacted to the imposition of modern agencies and institutions by calling for a return to traditional Islamic beliefs and practice supported by accepted religious orthodoxy, while others amongst them called for the modernisation of Islamic beliefs and practice supported by a contemporary interpretation of religious orthodoxy. Therefore, some *ulama* returned to the traditional Islamic education system of the Acehnese *dayah*, while, other *ulama* established modern Islamic schools that attempted to incorporate the features and curriculum of European education within an Islamic institution.

Thus, the traditional Islamic education system of Aceh faced external pressure from the Dutch colonial administration as well as internal pressure from amongst its own *ulama*, to modernise its curriculum and methods of instruction. Where, in addition to the secular Dutch schools, *volkschool* or *Sekolah Desa* (village school), and those of the Christian missionaries, a new type of Acehnese educational institution (*madrasah*) was developed which sought to accommodate the practical, secular sciences of European post enlightenment academic disciplines within a modern, yet orthodox Islamic framework. However, as Amiruddin points out, the Dutch administration eventually managed to bring all the *madrasahs* under state control, while, the *dayah* continued to remain apart, under the direction of individual *ulama* and 'since that time the *dayah* and *madrasah* have existed separately' (Amiruddin, 1994: 35). Therefore, despite the development of the *madrasah*, as a modern Islamic education institution, the traditional *dayah* school model continued to provide the rural Acehnese with access to a religious heritage that reached back through time for a thousand years.

Yet, the *madrasah*, which offered general or secular subjects in a graded school system with a set curriculum taught in the script of the Latin alphabet along with some religious instruction, contrasted starkly with the *dayah* which focused on traditional Islamic disciplines such as *kalam* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (Sufism) taught in classical Arabic while the instructors and students discussed the texts in an informal setting without grades.

However, while many of these *madrasah* or modern Islamic schools were established by *ulama* educated in the traditional *dayah*, the content of their curriculum and methods of instruction were based on modern reformed Islamic educational concepts and foreign colonial secular subjects that were focused on producing workers for the Dutch colonial administration. This modern school system included such Islamic educational institutions as *madrasah Sa'adah Abidiyah* established by Teungku M. Daud Beureueh, Syed Husein's *madrasah Ahlu's-Sunnah wal Djama'ah* in Idi, Teungku Abdul Wahab's *madrasah* in *Seulimeum* known as *Perguruan Islam*, and Teungku Abdurrahman Meunasah Meucap who established the *madrasah al-Muslim*. Hence, the traditional Islamic school system of Aceh was subjected to a process of European colonial driven modernisation and internal religious reform that brought about political tensions, social flux and educational challenges.

Thus, a number of Acehnese and pan Indonesian Islamic organisations were established as the local population struggled to articulate a coherent response to the various institutions of Dutch colonial policy. Where, the Muhammadiyah movement, founded and led by a group of Dutch educated Javanese Muslims intent on reforming religious education and orthodoxy, earned

widespread support amongst the modernised *ulebalang* of Aceh as its members sought to co-operate with the Dutch administration in order to establish a system of modern schools for the ordinary people of the Dutch East Indies. Yet, the Muhammadiyah movement's attempts to establish *madrassahs* in Aceh was slow to gather pace, as the intellectual and educational focus of its members along with its Javanese origin and leadership, ensured that its influence neither won overt Dutch support nor extended beyond the urban centres to the rural areas.

Hence, as Anthony Reid (1979: 23) points out, 'the *dayah*, the highest level of Islamic school in Aceh, was challenged by the *volkschools* on the one hand, and the new concepts of organization and education represented by Muhammadiyah on the other'. Where, a series of local *ulama* led social, religious and educational reform movements that sprang up across the countryside culminated in the establishment of PUSA (*Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh*—All-Aceh *Ulama* Association) in an attempt to organise the various institutions of education in the modern school system of Aceh. However, while many of the *ulama* from the traditional *dayah* system, as well as those from the small number of Muhammadiyah schools maintained their distinct identity, the PUSA organisation could soon claim to represent 'the voice of the people of Aceh' (Reid, 1979: 26). Consequently, in addition to establishing a *madrassah* school system that accommodated the social and religious reforms deemed necessary to modernise the youth of Aceh, the *ulama* of PUSA undertook public *dawa* (the call to Islam) social development programs and *tabligh* (preaching) tours which presented the same message to the rest of the rural population.

Indeed, as Yusny Saby points out 'it was against this backdrop that the division between the *ulama*, traditional or reformist took shape' (Saby, 1995: 99). Where, PUSA set about establishing the *sekolah normal Islam* (normal Islam institute) teacher training school and standardising the curriculum of its system. While, the traditional *ulama* simply got on with providing a religious education to the people of Aceh as they had done since Islam had arrived in the region. However, Saby's subsequent claim that 'this normal institute reflected the convictions of those reformist *ulama* who believed only through proper education could the superiority of the Acehnese be restored' (Saby, 1995: 99) could also be said of the traditional *ulama* of the *dayah* system, who as Muslim scholars belonging to an ancient tradition also believed that the superiority of the Acehnese could only be restored through proper education. Therefore, while the *ulama*, traditionalist and reformist, claimed the same goal their inability to work together toward achieving their aims was either based on different concepts of what constituted a proper education or what exactly the restoration and realisation of Acehnese 'superiority' could mean.

Thus, the reformist *ulama* of PUSA with widespread support from the rural population of Aceh soon entered the political arena as they sought to initiate a new era of Islamic reform. Hence, as the advancing Japanese army filled the vacuum left by the departing Dutch administration during the Second World War, the *ulama* of PUSA actively worked to bring about the subsequent *sudara tua* (older brother) Japanese occupation of Aceh in pursuit of their anti colonialist agenda. However, the Japanese soon proved to be less brotherly than they promised, suppressing the activities of PUSA, which they perceived as a fanatical Islamic organisation, while encouraging the non political Muhammadiyah instead. Indeed, after the Japanese surrender the attempted return of the Dutch failed in the face of widespread resistance to re-establish itself in Aceh, which was rapidly preparing itself for independence.



## Indonesia's Special Region

Indeed, as soon as the Japanese retreated from the Dutch East Indies, the Independence of the South East Asian archipelago was declared in Jakarta by Kusno Sosrodihardjo or Soekarno (1901–1970), the first President of the new republic and an Indonesian constitution was drawn up. Furthermore, Sumatra was declared a province of the new republic with the city of Medan (south the Acehese border) as its capital with its own local governor. However, despite these political developments, British army supported Dutch forces attempted to reassert their former colonial supremacy, against an ongoing and sustained resistance by local militia. While, PUSA mobilised its members and, with the support of some traditional *ulama*, declared a *prang sabil* (holy war) against the returning foreign invaders. Whereupon, a number of regional Islamic militias, referred to as either *Mujahidin* (one who wages *Jihad*) or *Hizbullah* (party of god) were mobilised across Aceh, made up of urban Muslims armed and trained by the departing Japanese as well as rural farmers armed with spears, *parang* (daggers) and *klewang* (swords).

Hence, the resulting conflict between local and colonial forces as well as amongst local groups struggling for supremacy, brought about an Acehese administrative power vacuum, which was partially filled by; a political movement appealing to both Acehese independence and Indonesian nationalism, an Islamic movement with an independent Acehese or Indonesian pan Islamic agenda supported by the reformist *ulama* of PUSA and a general population eager to achieve economic independence through material gain, all of which were ideologically led by the charismatic reformist *ulama* Daud Beureu'eh (1899-1987). Thus, not only did the *ulama* of PUSA have a significant influence on the formation and mobilisation of an Acehese anti colonial movement, but they also influenced the ideology that drove the political independence movement, which Anthony Reid describes as 'Islamic'.

However, as Reid (1979: 255) observes, the 'Islamic-educated theologians and reformers' who came to power in Aceh were 'too far removed in spirit from the Dutch-educated urban professionals who led the nationalist movement elsewhere' (Reid, 1979: 255). Hence, after problems with the Indonesian central government began to arise, a full scale rebellion broke out led by Beureu'eh, as the *dar-al Islam* (land of Islam) revolt swept across rural Aceh during the 1950's, bringing an end to PUSA activities. Where, despite the failure of repeated diplomatic attempts to resolve the differences between Aceh and Jakarta, the Indonesian republican army forced Acehese integration at gunpoint along with the promised status of 'special region' (Reid, 1979: 262) in control of its own cultural, religious and educational affairs, despite the ongoing activities of armed rebel groups.

Indeed, a letter written by Beureu'eh at this time is worth quoting at some length as it accurately reflects the attitude of many Acehese toward the Indonesian republican government that persists to the present day. Where, Tunkul Daud asserts that 'the government of the republic of Indonesia...has been buried and replaced by...a mask' that 'really is...a Hindu government wearing a nationalist shirt and very much resembling communism' which, as an institution, 'is patently anti-Islam, anti-god and largely run by the lackeys of the Dutch' and, furthermore, that 'as well as being anti-Islam and anti-god, they also hold as their enemies those Indonesians who are Muslims, especially the Acehese, because the Acehese defended the Indonesian lands from...the Dutch Government' (Reid, 2006: 154).

Yet, the central aspect of Sukarno's Indonesian states constitution was *Pancasila* (the Five Principles) which became 'the state ideology and philosophical basis of the new republic,' that, R. Murray Thomas (1988: 901) has defined as 'the belief in one God, national consciousness, humanism, social justice, and sovereignty of the people.' However, while the newly established Indonesian

republic became the world's largest Muslim country with 87 per cent of the population adhering to the faith, it would not be an Islamic state, as defined by the principles of Pancasila, nor would it be dominated by any other religion since the state officially recognises the right of Indonesians to be not only Muslim but also Christian (Catholic and Protestant), Buddhist and Hindu. Therefore, as a contributing factor to the continuing political, religious and social developments that have taken place in the Indonesian public space, the *Pancasila* principles became the basis of an all encompassing state ideology that transcends political, religious and social affiliations.

Thus, the Indonesian government adopted the secular system of general education that emerged from the western tradition, introduced by the Dutch colonial government, as the mainstream national form of schooling, the public *Sekolah* elementary to high school system, directly administered by the ministry of education. While, the religious schools of the Islamic education system that developed across the Indonesian archipelago since the thirteenth century, the traditional *dayah* school model, known as the *pesantren* or *surau* throughout the rest to Islamic South East Asia, as well as the reformist, modern model, the *madrasah*, were effectively administered by the department of religious affairs on behalf of the ministry of education. Thus, the curriculum of all schools in the 'special region' of Aceh became the indirect responsibility of the recently established Indonesian republics ministry of education and culture, as the representatives of an official state policy that increasingly sought the full integration of all regional institutions.

Yet, as Lambert Kelabora, a lecturer on Indonesian education, claims, the ministry of education and culture has 'been dominated by the Western-educated secular elite' (Kelabora, 1976: 235) since its inception. Hence, the implementation of the Indonesian government's official education policy, informed by the state constitution's *Pancasila* principles, that set out to establish a common curriculum, altered the status and focus of those Islamic religious schools that accepted the ministry's financial and material support. Where, the development of official state education policy placed limitations on the amount of time devoted to religious instruction in the Islamic schools, as well as the content of their curriculum. However, since most of the *ulama* of the traditional educational system of Aceh remained outside the official state education system, wherever possible, 'the *dayah*'s activities went on unreformed' (Amiruddin, 1994: 36).

Thus, as Aceh became increasingly integrated into the larger Indonesian republican state, a new independence movement, GAM was established by the highly respected Acehnese intellectual and political activist *Teungku* Hasan di Tiro. Where, di Tiro, claimed that Indonesia was a secular, neo-colonialist political construct that sought to absorb the Islamic *Negara Aceh Sumatra* (Acehnese area of Sumatra) into its national federation of states, despite the political definition of Aceh being based on an illegal occupation by Dutch imperialist forces. However, this claim was not based on an appeal to establish a future Islamic state; rather it argued that pre-colonial Aceh was defined by the extent of traditional Islamic religious authority rather than modern western political institutions. Therefore, as di Tiro appears to claim, Aceh did not rightfully exist as a politically defined region, because it was really an area of Islamic religious authority, ruled by a sultan with the support of *ulama* legitimacy, which the politically appointed government of Indonesia had no right to occupy or administer. However, whatever the GAM movements popular appeal, at no time during the rebels lengthy armed struggle against Indonesian authority, did either the modern or traditional *ulama* of Aceh expressed their support for di Tiro's claim *en masse*, even after the European brokered political solution in 2006.

## Conclusion

Thus, despite the Impact of the various political, economic and religious movements that have influenced South East Asia's historical development, the traditional *dayah* school model of Aceh has remained a central feature of the regions cultural landscape since its inception. Hence, the enduring presence and widespread distribution of the *dayah* educational institutions throughout modern Aceh continues to fulfil the needs of the ordinary Muslim population in a number ways. Where, in addition to providing an Islamic education the *dayah*, as the repository of traditional Acehnese culture, also represents the culmination of Aceh's historical Muslim experience. Indeed, in the absence of corresponding state institutions, the *dayah* symbolises a degree of community focus for many rural areas, oftentimes initiating local improvement schemes and developing a sense of social cohesion. Furthermore, the continued presence of the traditional *dayah* educated *ulama* serves to illustrate the possibility of an alternative, religiously orthodox lifestyle for Acehnese youths in the modern world.

Indeed, the competing education systems of Aceh, both modern and traditional, inform the student with contrasting world views based on a significantly different understanding of how to be a Muslim in the modern world. Where, the *madrassah* system provides a basic religious education as part of an overall curriculum established by western scientific principles in order to prepare the student for a useful role in modern society. While, the *dayah* system provides the student with an Islamic educational experience that, while remaining within a Muslim orthodox framework, also acknowledges the religions long standing tradition of metaphysical inquiry. Yet, the informal structure of the *dayah* systems administration accommodates the students need to acquire the practical skills necessary for social participation by recognising such activities as part of the individuals Muslim identity rather than discouraging them. Hence, the student can spend time developing the ability to earn a living within the community at large while also attending the *dayah*.

Indeed, the students of the modern and traditional education systems of Aceh graduate with different theological perspectives, where the *madrassah* system provides the student with a basic religious education, that is considered sufficient to establish Muslim identity, fully compatible with a productive role in the modern world of western scientific principles. While, the *dayah* system provides the student with a metaphysically informed Islamic education that develops a theological perspective of the modern world based on the Muslim religions unconditional acceptance of both; the Qur'an as the revealed word of God and the hadith traditions as the practices of the prophet Muhammad.

Therefore, the graduates of the modern *madrassah* schools seek to accommodate their Muslim identity within the institutions and systems of the modern world, reforming those aspect of religious identity that are incompatible with modernity and accenting others that are not, while the graduates of the *dayah* schools seek to accommodate the institutions and systems of the modern world that are compatible with their Muslim identity and reforming, or ultimately, rejecting those that are not. Thus, according to the contemporary Muslim philosopher Sayed al-Attas (1979: 32), 'it is more fundamental in Islam to produce a good man than a good citizen, for the good man will also no doubt be a good citizen, but the good citizen will not necessarily also be a good man.'

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